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TAGS: [PRELPGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [EG](#)  
SUBJECT: WAFD PARTY LEADERS U.S. "INTERFERENCE" IS  
UNDESIRABLE

ClassifiedBy: Ambassador Margaret Scobey, for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C) A November 20 meeting with 15 leaders of the liberal opposition party Al Wafd began with Wafd members questioning Ambassador Scobey extensively about President-elect Obama's foreign policy plans, particularly relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and lauding the U.S. elections as a democratic model for the rest of the world. Conversation then turned to Egypt's new parliamentary session, with Wafd president Mhmod Abaza lamenting that Egypt's Emergency Law (in force since 1981) is unlikely to be suspended and replaced with a new Anti-Terror Law. He also faulted the government for not moving faster on decentralization initiatives, and passing a new Local Administration law. Abaza expressed bewilderment over a recently announced ruling party initiative to give 40 million Egyptians free shares in privatized state-owned enterprises (septel) - "I do not understand this initiative. How can you distribute shares to that number of people, and have it have any kind of meaningful impact? No authentic development or privatization goals will be achieved."

12. (C) Abaza laid out two "scenarios for change" in Egypt - either chaos, or a true national dialogue and consensus that leads to the peaceful rotation of power. Abaza pointed out that convincing a powerful ruling regime of the need to "consult and share with others" is an "extremely difficult" task. He and other Wafd members stressed the "essential challenge we face is that the future is either an Islamic system here or the current status quo, neither of which is acceptable. A military coup is also an option, or, the government can open the door to a meaningful national dialogue, and not keep a stranglehold on power."

13. (C) In response to the Ambassador's query of how the U.S. can be helpful in advocating for political reform in Egypt, Abaza stressed that, due to centuries-long experience of foreign occupation, Egyptians are "allergic" to foreign "interference" in their affairs, "to the extent that if you scratch an Egyptian, he bleeds with sensitivity to this issue." Abaza asserted that, "U.S. interference on a policy level is not desirable." Rather, he urged that the U.S. assist Egypt in achieving development goals, which he viewed as key to political development - "help build schools, support teacher training, improve healthcare, and rebuild our infrastructure, which has so deteriorated over the past thirty years." Wafd secretary-general Monir Fakhry Abdelnour added that, "there is a thin line between helpfulness and interference." Mohamed Mustafa El Sherdy, a Wafd MP, recommended that "the best assistance you can provide prior to Egypt's 2010 parliamentary elections is to strongly demand that the elections are truly democratic, and demonstrate that you are not afraid of the Islamist bogeyman that the Egyptian government has promoted."

SCOBEY